



## Montana Fish. Wildlife & Parks

Region One  
490 North Meridian Rd.  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 752-5501  
FAX: 406-257-0349  
Ref:DV158-03  
August 15, 2003

TO: Ralph Goode, Chairman, Flathead Reservation Fish & Wildlife Board, 4717 Hillside Rd., Charlo, 59824  
CSKT Fish & Wildlife Program, PO Box 278, Pablo, 59855  
Sid Rundell, PO Box 162, Big Arm, 59910  
MFWP Commission  
Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Helena, 59620-1704  
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901  
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks: Director's Office, Legal Unit, Lands, Wildlife  
Mt Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Bldg., Helena 59620  
Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800  
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624  
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624  
Joe Gutkoski, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18<sup>th</sup>, Bozeman, 59715  
Polson City Library, PO Box 820, Polson, 59860  
Lake County Commissioners, 106 Fourth Ave. E, Polson, 59860  
Rep. John Brueggeman, 321 Lakeview Drive, Polson, 59860-9317  
Rep. Joey Jayne, 299 Lumpry Road, Arlee, 59821-9747  
Sen. Mike Taylor, Box 152, Proctor, 59929-0152

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area, Pheasants Forever Property Acquisition.

Questions and comments will be accepted through Monday, September 8, 2003, and a public hearing will be held at the Ninepipes Lodge (Allentown) at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, September 3, 2003. Please direct your questions or comments to Pheasants Forever Property Acquisition, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Vincent  
Regional Supervisor

/ni

Enclosure

c: USFWS Bison Range, Dave Wiseman, 132 Bison Range Road, Moiese, MT 59824  
Big Sky Upland Bird Association, PO Box 9005, Missoula, 59807-9005  
Ducks Unlimited, Great Plains Region, 2525 River Road, Bismarck, ND 58503-9011  
Denver Holt, Owl Research Institute, PO Box 39, Charlo, 59824  
Joe Ball, University of Montana Wildlife Coop Unit, 909 S Ave W, Missoula, 59801  
MT Dept. of Transportation, PO Box 201001, Helena, 59620-1001

*Lake  
Mist.*

Pheasants Forever Property Acquisition

Page 2

August 15, 2003

Polson Outdoors, Inc., Matt Bishop, PO Box 1432, Polson, 59860-1432

Warren Illi, Flathead Wildlife, PO Box 4, Kalispell, 59903

Flathead Audubon, PO Box 9173, Kalispell, 59904

Mountain Audubon, #1 Second Ave E, Suite C-179, Polson, 59860

Five Valleys Audubon, PO Box 8425, Missoula, 59807

Last Chance Audubon, PO Box 924, Helena, 59624

Lower Flathead Valley Community Foundation, Inc., William H. Edelman, 1050 Spring Creek Road, Ronan, 59864

Vic McAllister, CAC, 333 Light Road, Polson, 59860

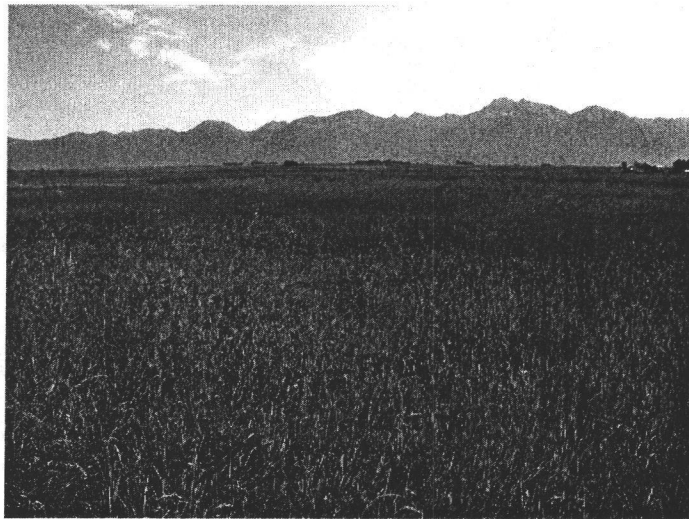
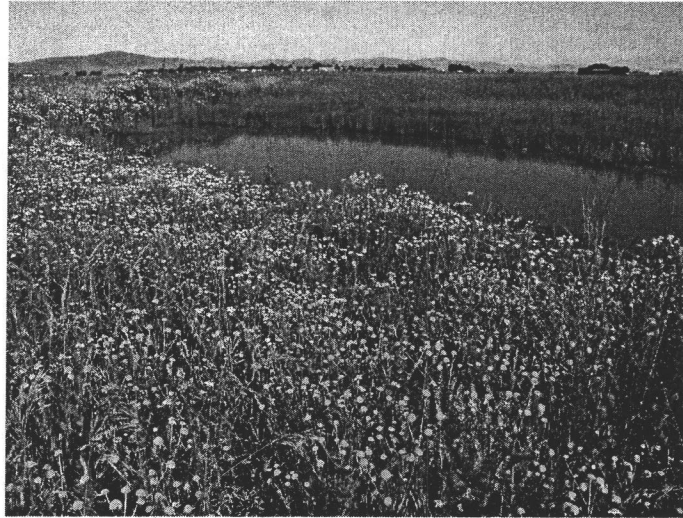
Rob Shrider, CAC, 204 Hwy 93 S, Ronan, 59864

Greg Schafter, President, Pheasants Forever

# **Pheasants Forever Property Acquisition Environmental Assessment**

**Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area**

**August 2003**



**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 North Meridian Road  
Kalispell, Montana 59901  
(406) 752-5501**

# **PROPOSED PHEASANTS FOREVER PROPERTY ACQUISITION ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
490 N. MERIDIAN ROAD  
KALISPELL, MT 59901  
(406) 752-5501

Public Comment Period:  
Monday, August 18 – Monday, September 8, 2003

Public Hearing:  
Wednesday, September 3, 2003  
7:00 – 8:00 p.m.  
Ninepipes Lodge (Allentown)

## Address Comments to:

Jim Williams  
Wildlife Program Manager  
490 N. Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901

(406) 752-5501

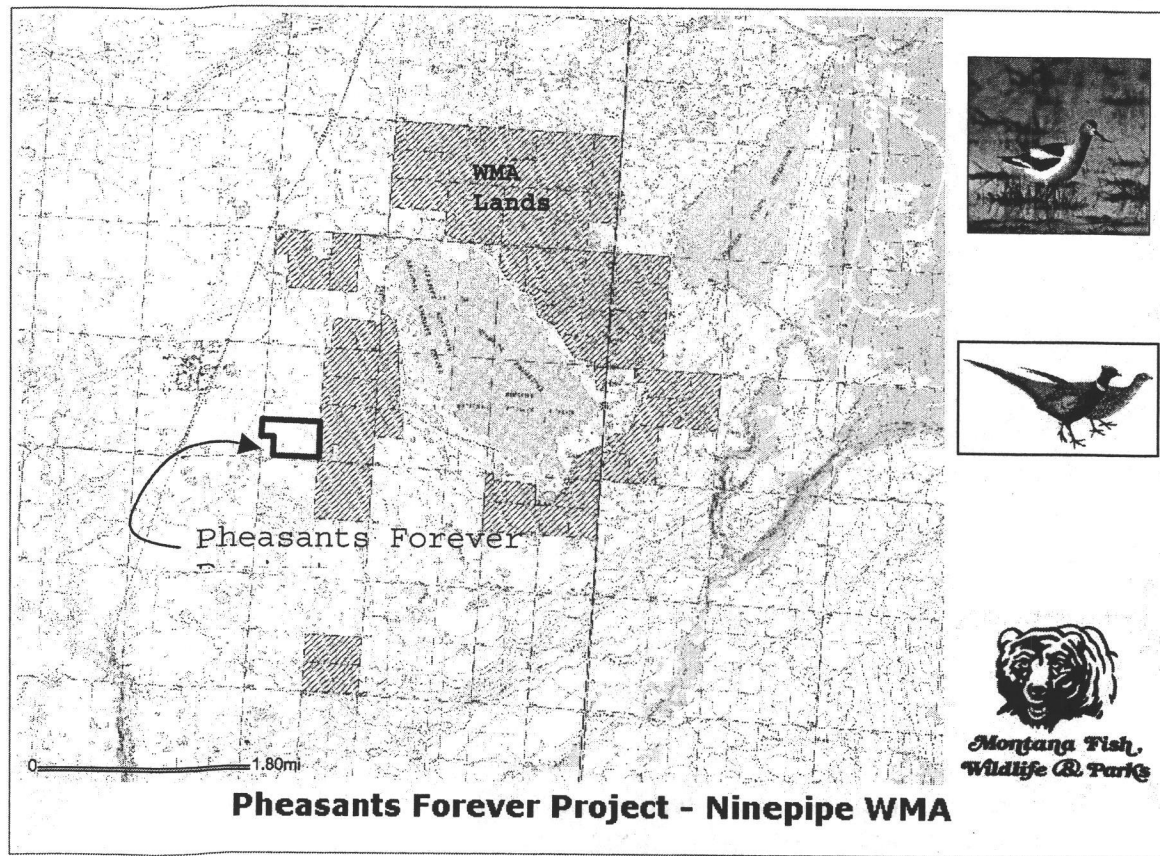
John Grant  
Ninepipe WMA Manager  
5791 Ninepipe Road  
Charlo, MT 59824

(406) 644-2510

## **INTRODUCTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' (FWP) habitat objectives for the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area include evaluating adjacent properties for high wildlife habitat value for potential sale in the event a landowner approaches FWP. The Pheasants Forever (70 acres) property is located immediately west of the Ninepipe WMA headquarters in an area that is a unique intermountain prairie pothole region of northwestern Montana. The property contains existing native and restored wetland habitats that would be enhanced under FWP ownership. Restoration of nine drained wetlands on the Pheasants Forever property was initiated this past summer.

Beginning in 1953, the Montana Fish and Game Department (now Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks) began acquiring parcels in this area with important wetland complexes because of the important wildlife and recreational values of the Ninepipe area. The Ninepipe WMA area includes the glaciated pothole portion of the Mission Valley from Ronan to Post Creek (see area map below). Prairie pothole habitat in



the Ninepipe area is limited by the geographic extent of glaciations and topography to an area of approximately 13,000 acres.

FWP proposes to acquire the Pheasants Forever property. The acquisition will be fee title and is for the purpose of preserving and enhancing habitat for a variety of avian and mammalian wildlife and to provide recreational hunting. The acquired lands would become part of the Ninepipe WMA and would be managed to provide public recreation associated with the wildlife populations.

The Ninepipe WMA area provides the most significant waterfowl and ring-necked pheasant habitat in northwestern Montana. This area also offers some of the best public waterfowl and upland bird hunting access in western Montana. There are numerous opportunities to improve or create waterfowl and pheasant habitat on this property following acquisition. This productive game-bird habitat supports a great diversity of other wildlife species, including owls and other raptors, shore birds, small mammals, and reptiles and amphibians. The general area supports one of the highest recorded densities of nesting short-eared owl and northern harrier. Winter concentration and diversity of raptor species in the general area rival other similar habitat types throughout North America.

## Land Ownership

The 70-acre Pheasants Forever property was recently purchased in fee-title by the Mission Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever based out of Ronan, Montana. This local chapter of Pheasants Forever, which is made up of hunters, businessmen, and local landowners, is holding this property in hopes that FWP can obtain approval from the FWP Commission to add it to the Ninepipe WMA for habitat enhancement and hunting access.

Because the property is located on the Flathead Indian Reservation, FWP contacted the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' (CSKT) Tribal Fish and Wildlife Program personnel to give them an opportunity to purchase this property if it meets habitat program objectives. The CSKT Tribal Fish and Wildlife Program personnel decided to not pursue this acquisition and informed FWP of their decision.

## Location/Legal Description

### Legal Description:

Township 19 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Lake County, Montana  
Section 4: S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$

EXCEPTING THEREFROM a portion of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 4, T19N, R20W, P.M.M., Lake County, Montana, more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the section corner common to Sections 4, 5, 8, and 9 and designated No. 3; thence  
along the section line common to Sections 4 and 5,  
N. 00°27'16"W., 675.25 feet to property corner designated No. 4; thence  
S. 88°36'38" E., 653.54 feet to property corner designated No. 1; thence  
S. 00°27'18" E., 658.54 feet to property corner designated No. 2 and the south  
section line of Section 4; thence  
S. 89°55'00" W., 653.22 feet along said section line to property corner  
designated No. 3 and the point of beginning.

Further identified as being Tract 1 on Certificate of Survey No. 5870, on file in the office of the Clerk and Recorder of Lake County, Montana.

Adjacent FWP land is managed as wildlife habitat by providing food plots, nesting cover for pheasants and waterfowl, and wetland developments, and is open to public hunting. Nearby USFWS and CSKT lands, also open for recreation, are highly productive wetland/grassland habitats managed with irrigation and occasional grazing. Adjacent private lands are used for grazing, farming, and home sites. Private hunting clubs own several nearby tracts of land.

Several drained, restored, and intact wetland basins occur on this parcel. Habitats for ring-necked pheasant, waterfowl, and numerous nongame birds, mammals, and reptiles/amphibians would be improved and preserved with acquisition by FWP. Bald eagles, sandhill cranes, tundra and trumpeter swans, and peregrine and prairie falcons are uncommon birds that would potentially suffer the most without land protection and habitat management. Recreational opportunity for waterfowl and upland bird hunters would increase following acquisition.

The land is bordered on two sides by county roads, which should provide ample access for waterfowl and upland bird hunters and also promote nondisruptive wildlife-viewing opportunities. The Mission Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever has also constructed a hunter parking area on the southeast corner of the property (see photo). Hunters will access this property virtually every day of the waterfowl and pheasant hunting seasons. On the opening weekend a minimum of 50 people would probably hunt pheasants on the property (Appendix Table 2). An estimated 150-250 hunter days would be provided season-long or annually.

Short-term objectives would include enhancing wetland and grassland habitat condition through water development and water delivery system enhancement. Long-term potential activities of wetland restoration and establishment of nesting cover and food plots would conserve soil, water, and wildlife resources.

Hiking, birdwatching, photography, dog training, and nature study are becoming increasingly popular and would all occur on this property. Some form of wildlife-oriented recreation occurs on the Ninepipe WMA every day of the year, and this level of use is expected to occur on the Pheasants Forever property as well. This property offers excellent birdwatching for waterfowl, raptors, and other birds. About 100 nonhunting recreational days per year would probably occur.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

This property is in a high priority area identified in the Five Valleys Prairie Pothole Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Plan. This plan identified high quality waterfowl production habitats in northwestern Montana. The property is situated amid a complex of tribal, state, and federally managed wildlife habitat protection sites. A habitat lease is not feasible as Pheasants Forever is hoping to recoup their costs and use that funding to do additional habitat projects.

The Farm Service Agency foreclosed on this property several years ago and placed an easement on the property that is being held by the Department of Interior. This easement protects this land from subdivision, but it does not provide for public access or guarantee waterfowl habitat enhancement or development. Therefore, FWP would like to acquire the property to add it to our habitat and recreation management program at Ninepipe WMA.

## Threatened or Endangered Species

Trumpeter swans will probably utilize the property following wetland area enhancement. Approximately 20 trumpeter swans were released in the Mission Valley this past summer and 30 were released two years ago. Grizzly bears have also been observed near the property on WMA lands in years past.

## Importance of Acquisition

Increased public waterfowl and pheasant hunting opportunity and quality are desired among the sport hunting public. This property represents a 70-acre piece of waterfowl and upland bird habitat that helps conserve the portion of the valley identified by state, tribal, and federal biologists as having exceptional wildlife habitat values. It is located directly adjacent to the Ninepipe WMA, which has very high hunter densities and where crowding concerns during hunting season are often raised.

Being adjacent to current WMA lands and near the WMA headquarters will allow easy assimilation into the current habitat and water management program with minimal additional effort or expense. Similar to other Ninepipe WMA properties, FWP would pay annual irrigation fees. The fee estimated for this property would be approximately \$2,000. Having intact and restorable wetland basins and being served by the Flathead Irrigation Project will enhance the wildlife production and habitat restoration potential.

Noxious weed control efforts would begin immediately and involve spot spraying, clipping, and pulling. Areas of bare ground would be broadcast with grass seed for cover and soil maintenance.

## **MANAGEMENT APPROACH**

Tax revenues collected by Lake County are not expected to change substantially. FWP would make cash payments in lieu of taxes to Lake County that would approximate the rate paid by a private landowner (see above).

Grain farming and haying by sharecroppers, management tools used on adjacent WMA lands, would potentially occur on portions of the Pheasants Forever property.

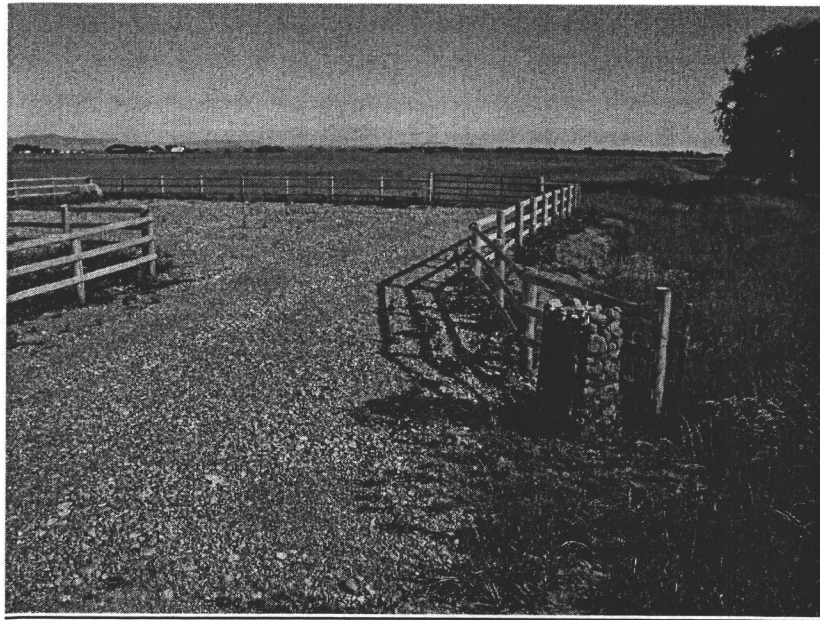
The economic value of this land for wildlife-related recreation and public expenditures to local merchants during the hunting seasons is high. We currently have project support from the Big Sky Upland Bird Association in Missoula, the Mission Valley chapter of Ducks Unlimited, and Polson Outdoors Incorporated.

Day-to-day management and operations costs would be incorporated into the current operations management program and budget at Ninepipe WMA. Current overall condition of the vegetation and soils on the parcel is fair. Pheasant populations are generally good, with potential to improve over time following acquisition. The Pheasants

Forever tract wetlands have been filled or partially drained. Work this past summer by Pheasants Forever was initiated to restore nine of the drained wetlands on the property (see cover photo). Ducks and Canada geese utilize the site for nesting and feeding. Irrigation of the pasture has kept grasses vigorous enough to resist extensive invasion by noxious weeds.

Pheasants and migratory birds (Appendix Figure 1) are the principle wildlife utilizing the site (see appendix tables) in its current condition, and their numbers vary widely. Population data specific to the property are not available, but most North American dabbling ducks occasionally use the wetlands, and many raptors are often seen there, as are shorebirds and occasionally sandhill cranes.

No public recreational opportunities have been available on the property historically. Pheasants Forever have not determined their policy for public hunter access while they negotiate with FWP. They did allow youth waterfowl hunting and some general season upland bird hunting last year. By dispersing public pheasant hunting pressure throughout Ninepipe WMA area, the quality of recreational experience for all hunters in the area would be enhanced if these 70 acres were added to the WMA. The Mission Valley Chapter did construct a high-quality hunter parking and access area this past winter (see photo below) that was dedicated to Dwight Stockstad, one of the Ninepipe WMA area pioneer wildlife biologists and local conservationist-hunter.



## **DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES**

### **Alternative A - No Action**

FWP would forego acquisition of the Pheasants Forever property to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat.

The No Action Alternative (Alternative A) would result in Pheasants Forever retaining fee title to the 70 acres of agricultural lands in Lake County. This alternative would provide for the maintenance of private ownership of the land. In this alternative FWP would lose the opportunity to pursue other strategies to maintain habitat for upland- and wetland-related wildlife species. Pheasants Forever would have the opportunity to sell the land to other interested individuals. Under this alternative, current wildlife values related to the land and the ongoing agricultural practices could not be assured into the future. Private bird hunting access is possible under this alternative.

### **Alternative B - Fee Title Acquisition**

Acquisition of the Pheasants Forever property by fee title (Alternative B) would give the state of Montana (FWP) ownership of the land, the opportunity to initiate the implementation of enhanced water delivery system management, and provide for enhancement for a variety of seasonal and yearlong wildlife and recreational uses. Under this alternative, FWP would maintain the vegetative condition of existing habitats, explore opportunities to create new or improved wildlife habitat, and allow existing perennial vegetation to maintain vigor. In addition, FWP would probably plant cover and food plots and allow public access for various recreational activities. FWP would pay in-lieu-of taxes equal to the real estate taxes paid by Pheasants Forever. Enhanced wildlife populations and increased public recreational opportunities would be realized.

Alternative B supports the acquisition by fee title of 70 acres of wetlands and irrigated hay/pasture land that will compliment FWP's management effort at Ninepipe WMA to produce and maintain habitats for a variety of wildlife and for a variety of compatible public uses. Alternative B would allow FWP to implement management strategies and management activities on the property that have been successfully employed on the adjacent Ninepipe WMA. Alternative B would result in significant increases in production of and seasonal use by ducks, geese, and pheasants, thereby creating an estimated 200 additional hunter days recreation each year.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

This section of the environmental assessment presents an evaluation of the impacts of the alternatives including secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical and human environment:

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

### Land Resources:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that soil stability would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** Acquisition of the Pheasants Forever property will maintain or improve soil stability and reduce erosion.

### Air Quality:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current air quality would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** No negative impacts on current air quality in the project area are anticipated.

### Water:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that wetland and water resources would be maintained or enhanced in the future.

**Alternative B:** The restoration of shoreline vegetation on natural wetlands would have a beneficial effect on the quality of surface and ground water.

### Vegetation:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current vegetation structure or quality would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** Shoreline vegetation on wetlands would be maintained or restored. This project would maintain the diversity, quantity, and quality of upland and wetland vegetation in the project area. The project, if accomplished, would have the potential to maintain the form and function of existing natural wetlands and improve the vegetative condition on 70 acres of irrigated hay/pasture and wetlands.

### Fish and Wildlife:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current fish and wildlife values would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** Maintained upland and wetland habitat condition and restoration of perennial vegetative cover in an area previously committed to agricultural production would positively influence the diversity and abundance of game birds, primarily ring-

necked pheasants and migratory waterfowl, nongame or watchable wildlife, and small mammals.

Threatened and endangered species, which occasionally use the area, include bald eagle and peregrine falcon. The projected improvements in the condition of wetlands and upland vegetation would increase the production of forage and prey for all those species.

## **HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

### Noise/Electrical Effects:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current noise and electrical levels would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** This project would not have any effect on noise or cause any electrical disturbance.

### Land Use:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current land uses would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** Habitat management for waterfowl and upland birds would result in an increase in recreational hunter use of the area and the associated economic benefits. The land would still be managed as a combination of nesting cover/haylands with some food plots under Alternative B.

### Risk/Health Hazards:

**Alternative A:** No action would probably maintain the status quo associated with risks and health hazards that are typical of most agricultural hayland operations

**Alternative B:** The proposed action includes the likelihood of chemical noxious weed control. Whenever chemicals are used, there is some potential for a small-scale spill. To reduce that potential, herbicides would only be applied by a licensed applicator following label instructions and taking all precautions to prevent an accidental discharge.

### Community Impact:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that the current agricultural and recreational nature of the property would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** The proposed action will maintain about 70 acres in an agriculture/wildlife base and will alter a growing trend toward rural residential

development. The proposed action will affect location and distribution, but not rate or density of human population growth. There would be positive effects to tourism, primarily in wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities. Open space and undeveloped lands will become more valuable in the future as residential development encompasses more and more rural lands. Any reduction in the vitality of the local economy would be at least partially offset by increases in retail merchandise, food, lodging, and travel supplies associated with wildlife-related recreation. See attached Socio-Economic Review for further detail.

#### Public Services:

**Alternative A:** No action would not prevent the sale of the property from occurring. New owners may not manage for waterfowl and upland bird habitat while continuing to provide free public hunting.

**Alternative B:** The proposed action includes a commitment by the State to pay in-lieu-of taxes on the land equal to that paid by the private landowner. Sale of the property and associated issues relative to public services would not occur under this alternative.

#### Aesthetics/Recreation:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current aesthetics and recreational values of the property would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** The proposed action will increase the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities by providing more abundant and diverse wildlife populations for hunting, photography, and viewing pursuits. Existing open space related to the current agricultural operations would be maintained.

#### Cultural/Historic Resources:

**Alternative A:** No action would not ensure that current cultural or historic resource values of the property would be maintained in the future.

**Alternative B:** This project would not result in the destruction of any known site, structure, or object of prehistoric or paleontological importance, nor would it interfere with any unique cultural or religious use of the site. Because the project does not include the disturbance of native sod or structures, it should not affect cultural or historic resources.

### **Summary Evaluation of Significance:**

Based upon evaluation of potential impacts related to the proposal, a determination has been made that an EIS is not required. The EA is an appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action because: 1) no endangered or threatened plant or animal species will be significantly affected; 2) there are no long-term or irretrievable impacts to the physical environment; and 3) there are minor impacts to the human environment in the form of increased recreational use, but all can be mitigated to acceptable levels.

### **List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:**

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
National Resource Conservation Service  
US Fish and Wildlife Service

### **Public Involvement :**

The Region and FWP have received considerable support for the proposal during project exploration and development. The Region will make the EA available to interested individuals, groups, and agencies, and will facilitate a public hearing at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 3, 2003, at Ninepipes Lodge (Allentown) to discuss the proposal and receive public comment.

### **Cost:**

The negotiated price of the property is approximately \$80,000 for 70 acres

## Appendix

**Appendix Table 1. 1999-2001 Ninepipe WMA Area Annual Summer Banding Results (Mission Valley)**

<u>Summer 2001 Captures</u>	<u>Ducklings (HY)</u>		<u>Adults (AHY)</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	
Mallard	295	220	302	222	1039
Green-winged Teal	3	1	1	1	6
Cinnamon Teal	2	0	0	0	2
Northern Pintail	5	3	2	4	14
Wood Duck	3	6	13	16	38
Redhead	5	6	2	1	14
Ruddy Duck	0	2	0	1	3

<u>Summer 2000 Captures</u>	<u>Ducklings (HY)</u>		<u>Adults (AHY)</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	
Mallard	627	481	277	201	1586
Green-winged Teal	1	1	0	0	2
American Wigeon	1	2	0	0	3
Blue-winged Teal	10	4	0	1	15
Cinnamon Teal	1	0	0	0	1
Northern Pintail	6	6	34	16	62
Wood Duck	3	1	20	4	28

<u>Summer 1999 Captures</u>	<u>Ducklings (HY)</u>		<u>Adults (AHY)</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	
Mallard	194	183	315	504	1196
Green-winged Teal	0	0	4	0	4
Blue-winged Teal	0	0	0	1	1
Northern Pintail	3	3	4	2	12
Wood Duck	1	0	26	8	35

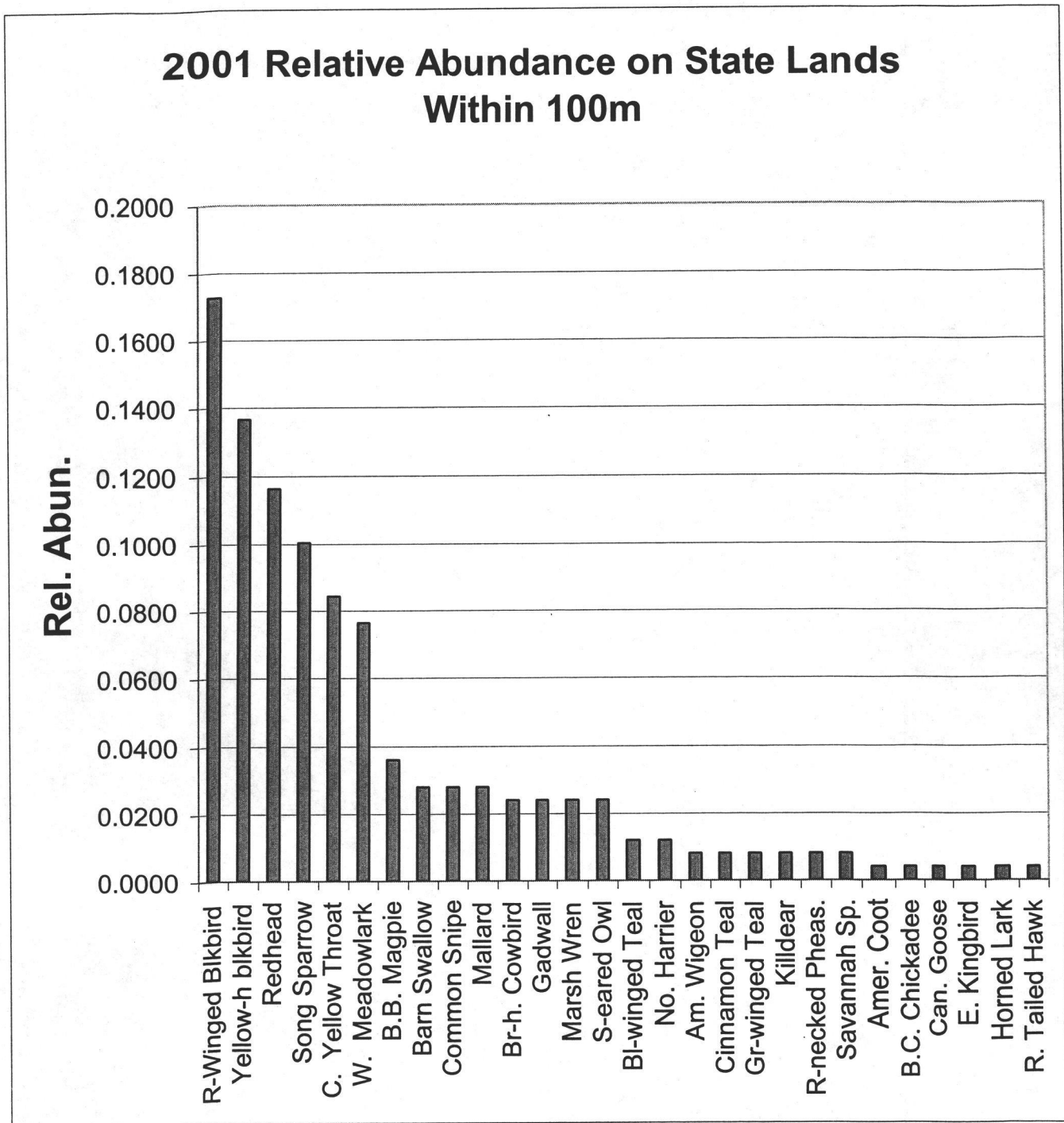
## **Appendix Table 2. Ninepipe WMA Pheasant Hunter Vehicle Count**

The table below lists the total number of vehicles (typically 1-4 pheasant hunters per vehicle) parked in parking lots and along the roadsides around the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area during both days of the opening weekend of the pheasant season from 1988 through 2001.

### **PHEASANT HUNTER VEHICLES ON SURVEY ROUTE AT NINEPIPE WMA**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Opening Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
1988	217	84
1989	192	122
1990	234	99
1991	169	64
1992	203	83
1993	203	76
1994	208	83
1995	149	55
1996	170	79
1997	165	66
1998	167	80
1999	134	49
2000	138	62
2001	135	37
2002	137	52

Figure 1. Relative Abundance of Ninepipe WMA Area Songbirds.



# **PHEASANTS FOREVER FEE TITLE ACQUISITION**

## **SOCIOECONOMIC ASSESSMENT**

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**

**August 11, 2003**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana Legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of property currently owned by Pheasants Forever. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title purchase.

## **II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING**

### **A. Property Description**

The Pheasants Forever property is located northeast of Charlo, Montana, in Lake County. A detailed description of this property is included in the Environmental Assessment (EA).

### **B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations**

Migratory birds and pheasants are the two main species utilizing the area although there are a host of nongame wildlife that also depend on these types of habitat. A complete list of species is available in the EA.

### **C. Current Use**

The Pheasants Forever property is currently used for hunting and upland bird habitat.

### **D. Management Alternatives**

- 1) Fee title purchase of the property by MFWP
- 2) No purchase

#### **MFWP Fee Title Purchase**

The fee title purchase will provide long-term protection for the wetlands this prairie pothole area supports, as well as conservation and enhancement of the extremely productive upland bird/waterfowl habitat and wildlife that this land sustains. In addition, public recreational opportunities including hunting, bird watching, and educational trips will be maintained.

### **No Purchase Alternative**

This alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property will vary depending on what the current owners decide to do with the property if MFWP does not purchase the land by fee title.

Public access may not be allowed depending on who purchases the property. The economic impacts associated with this alternative have not been estimated.

## **III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The fee title purchase will provide long-term protection of important wildlife habitat, help maintain the integrity of the adjacent Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and provide for public access for hunting and other recreational opportunities. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the fee title purchase from two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the fee title purchase to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures may have on local businesses (i.e., income and employment).

### **A. Financial Impacts**

The financial impacts on MFWP are related to the purchase price of the fee title purchase and maintenance/management costs. The Pheasants Forever property fee title purchase will cost MFWP roughly \$80,000 (pending appraisal). Maintenance/management costs related to the purchase are associated with maintaining fences, weed control, and irrigation. These costs are estimated to be around \$2,000 annually.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from fee title purchase. There will be no significant changes in tax revenues to local governments, including schools, due to the purchase. Taxes on this property were \$4,592.38 in 2002. Montana Code 87-1-603 states, "the treasurer of each county in which the department owns any land shall describe the land, state the number of acres in each parcel, and request the drawing of a warrant to the county in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen."

## **B. Economic Impacts**

The fee title purchase will not significantly affect the agricultural activities on the Pheasants Forever property. MFWP annually develops share-cropping arrangements on the hay land and acreage where grain is planted for food plots for waterfowl and upland birds at Ninepipe WMA. Consequently, there will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the ranching/farming activities in the long term.

The fencing, weed control, and irrigation work will provide positive financial impacts to local businesses supplying the materials for these projects.

Currently, the Ninepipe WMA provides about 3,000 hunter days per year. It is anticipated that the acquisition will improve the quality of the hunting experience by spreading these hunters over a larger area. In addition, nonhunting use such as wildlife viewing is expected to provide about 400 days of use. This activity will have a positive economic impact to the local business community of approximately \$16,000 - \$20,000 annually.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The fee title purchase will provide long-term protection for wildlife habitat, maintain the agricultural integrity of the land, ensure public access for hunting and other recreational/educational opportunities, and help ensure the overall integrity of Ninepipe WMA.

The fee title purchase of this property by MFWP will not cause a reduction in tax revenues from their current levels to Lake County, Montana.

Agricultural activities will continue on the WMA. Hunting and other recreational activities will continue at their present levels and in some cases increase. The financial impacts of this acquisition to local businesses will be neutral to positive in both the short term and long run.